



*The Infoalert offers abstracts of current articles, mostly from US publications and by US authors, highlighting significant issues in five major areas of international or U. S. domestic affairs. Views expressed in the articles are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect U.S. government policies*

# **Infoalert**

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### **DEMOCRACY AND GLOBAL ISSUES**

#### **IA63 McMillan, Graeme How Many People Actually Use Twitter? Good**

**Question** (Time Magazine, August 29, 2011) Currently available online at <http://techland.time.com/2011/08/29/how-many-people-actually-use-twitter-good-question/>

Twitter estimates there are about 460,000 sign-ups per day; some 200 million users total. But Business Insider estimates that there are actually less than 21 million active users -- "active" meaning more than 30 feeds being followed.

#### **IA64 Rinaudo, Tony. The Development Of Farmer-Managed Natural**

**Regeneration** (The Great Change, October 14, 2011) Reposted on a guest blog with an introduction titled "Getting to 350 with a \$2 Pocket Knife" at <http://peaksurfer.blogspot.com/2011/10/getting-to-350-with-2-pocket-knife.html>

Rinaudo, a natural resource management advisor with World Vision Australia, who has worked extensively in Africa, writes that conventional methods of reforestation in Africa have not been successful, and the factors working against it are tremendous. However, a method known as farmer-managed natural regeneration (FMNR) could change this; it has worked wonders in the agricultural region of Niger, an area that was severely degraded by deforestation and poor farming practices. The process involves selecting and pruning stems regenerating from stumps of trees felled during land clearings, but still alive. FMNR is simply a form of coppicing and pollarding, used for centuries in Europe, but unknown to the farmers of Niger, who traditionally viewed trees as "weeds" that competed with food crops. Rinaudo writes that the acceptance of FMNR was slow, and many long-standing habits were hard to break, such as a tradition of free access to cut down trees on anybody's property. However, as farmers realized that their crops grew better amongst the trees, the program quickly spread; as a result, three million hectares in Niger have been revegetated. Rinaudo notes that this could easily be replicated elsewhere, if such a success was possible in one of the world's poorest countries, with little investment by NGOs or the government.

#### **IA65 Gore, Al. Climate Of Denial (Rolling Stone, No. 1134/1135, July 7-21,**

**2011, pp. 76-84)** Currently available online at <http://www.rollingstone.com/politics/news/climate-of-denial-20110622>

The former vice president and the 2000 Democratic presidential nominee compares the news media's role in informing about the climate change debate to that of a distracted referee in a phony entertainment wrestling match, who never seems to notice when the bully commits an outrageous violation of the "rules", but always penalizes the good guy for the slightest infraction. The camp Gore describes as the "Polluters and Ideologues" have conducted a well-financed and orchestrated

campaign for two decades to sow doubt about the overwhelming scientific reality of climate change, and are prepared to vilify those who stand up to them; as the “distracted referee”, the news media is saturated with entertainment programming and seems intent on providing a “balanced” discussion. Gore writes that our public discourse “has become so deeply dysfunctional that our ability to make intelligent collective decisions has been seriously impaired” -- television, our new public commons, has become “refeudalized,” with its owners charging high rents for public access, which only big business, with its own agenda and the money to fund political campaigns, can afford. Gore believes that our political system is not yet so irretrievably corrupted that ordinary citizens cannot make their voices heard, and suggests several ways to make a difference. He concludes that the climate crisis “is a struggle for the soul of America; it is about whether or not we are still capable ... of perceiving important realities clearly enough to promote the well-being of the many.”

**IA66** Raloff, Janet. **Weeds Increasingly Immune To Herbicides** (Science News, July 2, 2011) Currently available online at [http://www.sciencenews.org/view/generic/id/330904/title/Weeds\\_increasingly\\_immune\\_to\\_herbicides?utm\\_medium=twitter&utm\\_source=twitterfeed](http://www.sciencenews.org/view/generic/id/330904/title/Weeds_increasingly_immune_to_herbicides?utm_medium=twitter&utm_source=twitterfeed)

The author notes that many widely used agricultural weed-control chemicals are becoming ineffective against weeds that are developing herbicide resistance. Researchers warn that with no alternatives in development, farmers could see crop yields drop and prices climb. Farmers have waged a battle against weeds since time immemorial, but the situation changed almost overnight in 1996, when crops were introduced that possessed a genetically-engineered immunity to glyphosate, the weed killer known as Roundup. Growers used Roundup to an unprecedented extent, without fear of losing their crops, which created the perfect conditions for weeds to develop resistance to it. Other weeds have developed herbicide resistance through interbreeding, by being pollinated by the genetically-altered resistant crop genes. In order to stall the evolution of herbicide resistance in weeds, many scientists now advocate rotating crops and diversity of weed management.

## ECONOMIC SECURITY

**IA67** Coghlan, Andy; MacKenzie, Debora. **Revealed: The Capitalist Network That Runs The World.** (New Scientist, October 19, 2011) Currently available online at <http://www.newscientist.com/article/mg21228354.500-revealed--the-capitalist-network-that-runs-the-world.html>

A recent study by complex systems theorists at the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology in Zurich used corporate data and mathematics for modeling natural systems to map ownership among the world's transnational corporations. What they found was that a relatively small number of companies, chiefly financial institutions, wield disproportionate power over the global economy. A group of 1318 corporations form the core of the economy, and within that, there is a “super-entity” of 147 companies that controlled 40 percent of the total wealth in the network. The study's authors note that such concentration of economic power is not good or bad in itself, but that the study's value is for the insights it provides on economic stability, and suggesting ways to make the global economy less vulnerable to disruptions. One is to implement global anti-trust rules, which currently exist only at the national level, to limit interconnectedness among the biggest entities.

**IA68** Griesgraber, Jo Marie. **Realpolitik And The IMF** (Georgetown Journal of International Affairs, vol. 12, no. 2, Summer/Fall 2011, pp. 106-111)

The author, executive director of the New Rules for Global Finance Coalition and the Economic Policy Institute, believes that the financial crisis, which occurred when the International Monetary Fund (IMF) was at its political and economic nadir, has emphasized the need for a radical change in the governance of global financial institutions. With help from the G20, the IMF changed from a moribund and almost penurious body to a competitor for global preeminence as global financial rule-maker, reviewer and implementer. For IMF governance, the financial crisis had the effect of removing any democratic façade, revealing the realities of realpolitik decision-making. Discontent from the financial crisis persists, however, and rumors of new power principles warrant analysis and support.

**IA69** Soros, George. **Does The Euro Have A Future?** (New York Review of Books, October 13, 2011) Currently available online at <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/archives/2011/oct/13/does-euro-have-future/>

Legendary investor George Soros writes that the current euro crisis is a consequence of the financial crash of 2008. After the investment bank Lehman Brothers failed, the European finance ministers agreed in November of that year that no important financial institutions would be allowed to fail. However, that guarantee would be exercised by each country individually, not the eurozone as a whole; Soros argues that the lack of a common treasury, and the political will to create one, has exacerbated the euro crisis. The European Financial Stability Facility (EFSF), created belatedly last year, is not adequately capitalized to support a bailout of a bigger country like Spain or Italy, and was not designed to deal with the banking system. Soros believes that, to escape the current scenario, the authorities should prepare for the possibility of default and temporary departure from the eurozone of Greece, Portugal and Ireland. Additionally, four measures need to be taken: bank deposits should be protected; banks in defaulting countries should be kept functioning; the European banking system should be put under pan-European, not national supervision; and government bonds of other deficit countries should be protected from contagion.

**IA70** Vlastic, Mark; Cooper, Greg. **Repatriating Justice: New Trends In Stolen Asset Recovery And Fighting Corruption** (Georgetown Journal of International Affairs, vol. 12, no. 2, Summer/Fall 2011, pp. 98-105)

The authors believe that recovering financial assets stolen by corrupt leaders such as Haiti's Jean-Claude Duvalier has been very difficult while uprisings in the Middle East and in North Africa over the last few months have made this one of the busiest years for international asset freezes and talk of asset recovery. Although challenges remain, a combination of efforts by key nations such as the United States and Switzerland, as well as renewed focus on the issue by international institutions have created some momentum in recovering these assets. The first major step was the 1999 OECD Anti-Bribery Convention. Then, in 2005, after years of negotiation, one hundred forty countries signed the UNCAC (United Nations Convention against Corruption), the world's first truly global treaty against corruption.

## INTERNATIONAL SECURITY

**IA71** Fallows, James **Hacked!** (Atlantic Monthly, November 2011) Currently available online at <http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2011/11/hacked/8673/>

After his wife's Gmail account was hacked by a scammer who sent a bogus email to everyone in her address book asking for money because she had been "mugged in Madrid" and she lost six year's worth of emails, Fallows launched a serious investigation of such attacks at the epicenter of Internet activity, Google. What he discovered from Google experts is sobering, and a warning about the importance of vigilance and the use strong, varied passwords. Big Internet companies such as Google, which sustain thousands of hacking attempts daily, are quickly developing counter strategies because of the volume of attacks. Nevertheless, countless vulnerable spots are uncovered daily as cybercriminals become more sophisticated. The message is that responsibility is both individual and organizational in the emerging era of "cloud" data storage.

## U.S. SOCIETY & VALUES

**IA72** Erlandson, Rene J. **Handheld Education: Applied Mobile Technology** (Choice, vol. 48, no. 9, May 2011, pp. 1605-1614)

This essay provides an overview of the proliferation of mobile computing programs across undergraduate educational institutions and in libraries, examines electronic resources available in mobile versions, explores a variety of commercial and free tools available for use in developing components of mobile programs, and identifies useful resources for keeping abreast of developments in mobile technology in higher education and libraries. The author, director of Virtual Services, University of Nebraska Omaha Criss Library, believes that many colleges are examining ways to incorporate mobile technologies into the educational experience of undergraduates. In an effort to support academic institutional missions and provide library resources and services to a growing number of constituents on the move, many libraries are developing mobile initiatives that may include mobile Web sites, device or platform-specific mobile applications, and other mobile services. The movement to support mobile access within academic libraries has librarians evaluating newly emerging mobile products and creating library-specific mobile products and services.

**IA73** Kamps, Alice. **What's Cooking, Uncle Sam?** (Prologue, vol. 43, no. 2, Summer 2011, pp. 6-12)

The author, curator of a new National Archives exhibition that chronicles the federal government's attempts to change the American diet through laws, regulations and guidelines. Teaching people about the nutritional value of foods was one thing; getting them to change their eating habits was quite another. This is not a recent phenomenon; from 1905-1918, Frank Meyer was recruited by the U.S. Department of Agriculture to travel some 10,000 miles, mostly on foot, to China, Siberia, and what was then Manchuria, Turkestan, and Mongolia, in search of new varieties of fruits, nuts, and grains for American agriculture. In the years approaching World War II, nutrition became a matter of national security. Today, the federal government monitors health and fitness of Americans through various regulatory agencies that include, besides Agriculture, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

**IA73 Meade, Michael. Where Have All The Wise Men Gone?** (Huffington Post, September 11, 2011)

Meade, founder of the Mosaic Multicultural Foundation, writes that “we live in a time of great forgetting” – in traditional cultures, elders were respected, as without their guidance, society could lose its way. In modern life, instead of growing “older and wiser, people simply can grow older and older ... when there is no genuine growth in growing older, aging can become all about loss.”

Meade writes that in a culture where older folk are in the majority, there “seems to be a lack of knowing elders who can recall essential things in the midst of the great crises troubling both nature and culture.” He believes that the gridlock in the nation’s capital, where the political parties “fight over who might be the ‘adult in the room’” is symptomatic of a lack of genuine courage and vision among older folk. While the 1960s were characterized by a youth revolution, the current stalemate may involve an “elder awakening” to solve the multiple challenges facing us, such as poverty, joblessness, climate change and sustainability. Currently available online at

[http://www.huffingtonpost.com/michael-meade-dhl/older-vs-elder\\_b\\_954780.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/michael-meade-dhl/older-vs-elder_b_954780.html) [PUBS;GWB]

**IA74 Sontag, Michael; Jenkins, Paul; White, Ronald. Leadership Ethics: An Emerging Academic Discipline.** (Choice, vol. 49, no. 2, October 2011, pp. 239-249)

The authors, with the College of Mount St. Joseph, note that public outrage over the recent epidemic of ineffective or unethical leadership in business, politics, sports and religion has led to a growing interest in leadership ethics. It has developed as a new academic discipline in many colleges and universities; existing research that would fall in this field is still not widely shared across disciplines, with much “bridgework” to be done. Ethical leadership focuses on how leaders use their social power in the decisions they make, actions they engage in and ways they influence others; the character and integrity of the leader provide the basis for personal characteristics that direct a leader’s ethical beliefs, values, and decisions. Motivating followers to put the needs or interests of the group ahead of their own is another quality of ethical leaders. In return, individual values and beliefs impact the ethical decisions of leaders. [PUBS; MJM]

**IA75 Wahl, Grant. Welcome To The World** (Sports Illustrated, vol. 115, no. 5, August 8, 2011, pp. 36-40) Currently available online at

<http://sportsillustrated.cnn.com/vault/article/magazine/MAG1188913/index.htm>

The author describes the Palestinian national soccer team and their campaign to qualify for the 2014 World Cup. For an ultimate long shot like Palestine, the World Cup is as much about political inclusion and global acceptance as it is about quixotic hopes of a title. The team includes two schoolteachers, a waterworks employee, more than a dozen other amateurs and a blond-haired American from Georgia with a Mohawk and a Southern drawl, Omar Juran. The World Cup has become a big-time event in the United States, a mainstream attraction that draws TV audiences comparable to those for the World Series and the NBA Finals. However, the World Cup isn't just a 32-nation tournament that takes place over the span of a month every four years. In fact, most countries call that event the World Cup finals to distinguish it from the marathon global qualifying campaign that lasts 29 months and involves more national teams than there are members of the United Nations. The U.S. enters its 16-game regional qualifying process next June. No single athletic event produces as many compelling stories involving nationalism, politics and Cinderella tales.